

THE 'VALLEY OF THE PLANETS'-LIBYA'S EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD



NEEL ROBERTS
Sky's the Limit

The Earth is full of surprises and secrets we couldn't possibly cover in a lifetime.

One that I'd never heard of before is the "Valley of the Planets" located a few minutes south of Ghat, Libya.

Its rock formations, called "Trovants," resemble solar system planets and have sparked imaginations for eons. These geological formations are an enigma and radically differ from other rock shapes on Earth. They not only naturally gradually grow but also move and reproduce like living organisms after

their concentric circles like tree circles are observed. Thus, the nomenclature "living" or "moving" stones.

Check out Google Earth as there's little data as to the exact location. It really is the wild, wild west of discoveries as there's no clearing house on its findings and little knowledge on its history.

A few websites have limited information but its pictures are stunning. I tried reaching out to an English-speaking Libyan tour company that seemed to handle business from the West and never heard back.

The stone shapes resemble Jupiter, Saturn and even UFOs! The average diameter of each rock is about 10 metres, as the spherical rocks are stacked side by side for about 30 kilometres.

Visiting the site would be no walk in the park. Ghat is over 1,300 kilometres from the capital of Tripoli and while the town of

over 22,000 people has a tourism industry, the average temperature passes 100 F.

However, to those who get there, it would be a trip of a lifetime with photos and videos you could not get anywhere else.

The hard access to the main world has probably preserved it in original shape and this eighth wonder of the world and needs to be protected not just for the residents but future generations.

SKY WATCH

This month is an excellent month to view the Milky Way without freezing. The best time to do so is after 11 p.m. until dawn.

On Thursday, Aug. 11 after sunset, look southeast-east watch a full moon rise with Saturn into the night.

Friday, Aug. 12 after dark will be the peak of the Perseids meteor shower, with an esti-

mated rate of 144 meteors per hour. However, the moon will be only 2 days past full phase at the shower's peak, presenting significant interference throughout the night. The best time to view is starting at 11 p.m., facing the north-northeast in the constellation of Perseids until dawn. Check out this viewing guide for details: .

On Wednesday, Aug. 31 before sunset, look southeast-east with a good telescope to see the rings of Saturn in daylight.

AUGUST EVENT

Mark down Saturday, Aug. 13, from 9 p.m. to midnight, for Saturnalia under an August Sky. There will be an array of scopes operated by University of Calgary astronomers and members of the Calgary chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. In the RAO Interpretive Centre, there will be talks on Saturn and the Ancients and a retrospective of the mighty Cassini spacecraft and its 20-year mission.

Tickets at \$10 per person and are available for purchase on the Eventbrite link on the website ucalgary.ca/rao. For further information, contact Jennifer Howse at jhowse@phas.ucalgary.ca or 403-931-2366.

Neel Roberts is a local astronomer and welcomes your comment at Neel.Roberts@ptccanada.com and 403-560-6574. Check out his work at www.ptccanada.com.